

Om Namah Shivaya Mantra

Om Namah Shivaya (Panchakshara Mantra, five syllables) is a potent and popular mantra, which is at the heart of the Vedas and Tantra, and is widely used in this and other variations in the Himalayan tradition, as well as by others. While there are other descriptions of the mantra, the following focuses on meanings for mantra meditation leading to Self-Realization.

AUM/OM: Absolute reality. That which encompasses the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, represented by AUM, the three levels of gross, subtle, causal, the three levels of conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and the three universal processes of coming, being, and going. Absolute silence beyond the three levels is the silence after AUM. It also refers to Tripura, the one who live in the "three cities" as in Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, as well as the light referred to in Gayatri Mantra.

Namah/Namaha: Adoration, homage, respect. Nothing is mine (as an individual person); everything is thine (as the Absolute Reality). The three levels of Om, the three worlds of gross, subtle, and causal, along with the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states of consciousness, as well as the three levels of conscious, unconscious, and subconscious themselves are "not mine" as the true properties of who I really am. Truly, "nothing is mine." Rather, everything, all of these triads is "thine" or the "other" as the Absolute Reality.

Shivaya/Shiva: That Absolute Reality that is the ground out of which the others emerge. It is that "ink," so to speak, that is not separate from the many forms which may appear to manifest or be created from that ink. In the Realization of this, one comes to see that he or she is one and the same with the Absolute Reality. The Mahavakyas, the great utterances, are seen to be true. Shiva (the static or ground) and Shakti (the active or creative) are seen to be one and the same. She (Shakti), while one with Shiva is realized in direct experience as the one in the three worlds (Tripura) outlined in Om.

The Five Sacred Syllables: The Om Namah Shivaya mantra has five syllables: na-mah-shi-va-ya (sometimes called six syllable mantra by including Om). Thus, Om Namah Shivaya mantra is called five-syllable mantra, or Panchakshara Mantra (panch means five). Among other things, these five represent the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Thus, the Om Namah Shivaya mantra leads awareness in the reverse order from manifestation back to the source from which manifestation arose.

Meditation after Japa: When you practice japa (repetition) of the Om Namah Shivaya mantra, whether pacing yourself with mala or a certain number of minutes, it is best to follow this with a few minutes of silent meditation, simply allowing an internal Om to lead to inner silence, with no words or syllables. Just quietly allow attention to rest on the breath at the nostrils, the heart, or the space between the eyebrows.

40 day practice

The period of 40 days has been widely recognized as an auspicious period both in the East and the West since ancient times. A traditional way to do an extended mantra practice is to choose a number of repetitions per day, and to do that for 40 days. The mind likes to have a beginning and end to a practice, a sense of completion, such as comes with a 40 day (or longer) practice.

Fixed time per practice session: Mind finds comfort in knowing that it will do the practice of one round of 108 repetitions of the beads on a mala (or some other number of rounds), and that each round will take a predictable amount of time (approximately 18 minutes per round of 108 repetitions, plus or minus).

Same number of rounds: Mind also likes the predictability of doing a certain number of rounds done per day. Mind may resist at times, but once it gets started in the practice, mind likes the habit.

Specific number of days: Mind also likes the plan of knowing how many days or months a practice will take to complete. This can be very beneficial in stabilizing a noisy mind, which is a common complaint.

Freedom in discipline: It has been said that there is freedom in discipline; choosing to do a regular practice frees the mind from wondering what practice will be done that day. It is also important not to do the mantra practice with rote repetition, but rather, with feeling and awareness.

Decide for yourself: By running your own experiment for 40 days, you can decide for yourself the degree to which the practice is beneficial.

Extended practice

Purascharna: A noticeable level of mantra siddhi (power of the mantra) is said to come with 125,000 repetitions of a mantra. Such an extended practice is called a purascharna. This is equivalent to 1250 rounds of a mala, traditionally counting 100 of the 108 beads.

Malas per day / Approximate minutes per day / Total days / Total months

1	5 min	1250	42
2	10 min	625	21
3	15 min	417	14
4	20 min	313	10.5
5	25 min	250	8.5
6	30 min	209	7

8	40 min	156	5.2
9	45 min	139	4.6
10	50 min	125	4.2
11	55 min	114	3.8
15	1 hr, 15 min	83	2.8
20	1 hr, 40 min	63	2.1
25	2 hrs, 5 min	50	1.7
30	2 hrs, 30 min	42	1.4
35	2 hrs, 55 min	36	1
40	3 hrs, 20 min	31	1

Stabilizing Mind: Such an extended practice with Om Namah Shivaya mantra can have an excellent effect in stabilizing the mind in preparation for advancing in meditation. Such a practice must be done personally to understand the benefits. It does take commitment to do this practice every day for such a long period, but it is worth the effort.

Have Stability: In choosing the level of practice per day, it is important to have stability from one day to the next, and to not skip any days. It is best to choose the level that works for you consistently, rather than changing the number from day to day. For example, if two rounds per day is a good number, then it's better to stay with that amount each and every day, not to do none on one day, but four on the next day.

Mahapurascharna: A very long japa practice is called Mahapurascharna (maha=great, large, or long). A mahapurascharna of Om Namah Shivaya is 500,000 repetitions, or 5,000 malas. This practice is done by people who have sufficient time available. A one year practice will take about 15 malas per day, about 2 hours per day. Do the math with your calculator.

This practice is extremely useful, and while it is not as intense as Gayatri or Mahamrityunjaya, it is best done with ongoing, regular contact with a yogi who has already completed such a practice, as it has a purifying effect when the unconscious comes forward; it is best to have somebody to talk with about your experiences.